

# The Way of Peace

By Alice Brown

IT was two weeks after her mother's funeral when Lucy Ann Cummings sat down and considered. The web of a lifelong service and devotion still clung about her, but she was bereft of the creature for whom it had been spun. Now she was quite alone, save for her two brothers and the cousins who lived in other townships, and they all had homes of their own. Lucy Ann sat still, and thought about her life. Brother Ezra and Brother John would be good to her. They always had been. Their solicitude redoubled with her need, and they had even insisted on leaving Annabel, John's daughter, to keep her company after the funeral. Lucy Ann thought longingly of the healing which lay in the very loneliness of her little house; but she yielded, with a patient sigh. John and Ezra were men-folks, and doubtless they knew best. A little more than a week had gone when school "took up," rather earlier than had been intended, and Annabel went away in haste, to teach. Then Lucy Ann drew her first long breath. She had resisted many a kindly office from her niece, with the crafty innocence of the gentle who can only parry and never thrust. When Annabel wanted to help in packing away Grandma's things, Aunt Lucy agreed, half-heartedly, and then put off the task from day to day. In reality, Lucy Ann never meant to pack them away at all. She could not imagine her home without them; but that Annabel would not understand, and her aunt pushed aside the moment, reasoning that something is pretty sure to happen if you put things off long enough. And something did; Annabel went away. It was then that Lucy Ann took a brief draught of the cup of peace.

Long before her mother's death, when they both knew how inevitably it was coming, Lucy Ann had, one day, a little shock of surprise. She was standing before the glass, coiling her crisp gray hair, and thinking over and over the words the doctor had used the night before, when he told her how near the end might be. Her delicate face fell into deeper lines. Her mouth dropped a little at the corners; her faded brown eyes were

hot with tears, and, stopping to wipe them, she caught sight of herself in the glass.

"Why," she said aloud, "I look just like mother!"

And so she did, save that it was the mother of five years ago, before disease had corroded her, and patience wrought its tracery in her face.

"Well," she continued, smiling a little at the poverty of her state, "I shall be a real comfort to me when mother's gone!"

Now that her moment of solitude had struck, grief came also. It glided in, and sat down by her, to go forth no more, save perhaps under its other guise of a patient hope. She rocked back and forth in her chair, and moaned a little to herself.

"Oh, I never can bear it!" she said, pathetically, under her breath. "I never can bear it in the world."

The tokens of illness were all put away. Her mother's bedroom lay cold in an unsmiling order. The ticking of the clock emphasized the inexorable stillness of the house. Once Lucy Ann thought she heard a little rustle and stir. It seemed the most natural thing in the world, coming from the bedroom, where one movement of the clothes had always been enough to summon her with flying feet. She caught her breath, and held it, to listen. She was ready, undisturbed, for any sign. But a great fly buzzed drowsily on the pane, and the fire crackled with accentuated life. She was quite alone. She put her hand to her heart in that gesture of grief which is so entirely natural when we feel the stab of destiny; and then she went wanly into the sitting-room, looking about her for some pretense of duty to solace her poor mind. There again she caught sight of herself in the glass.

"Oh, my!" breathed Lucy Ann. Low as they were, the words held a fullness of joy.

Her face had been aging through these days of grief; it had grown more and more like her mother's. She felt as if a hand had been stretched out to her, holding a gift, and at that moment something told her how to make the gift enduring. Running over to the little table where her mother's work-

basket stood, as it had been, undisturbed, she took out a pair of scissors, and went back to the glass. There she let down her thick gray hair, parted it carefully on the sides, and cut off lock after lock about her face. She looked a caricature of her sober self. But she was well used to curling hair like this, drawing its crisp silver into shining rings, and she stood patiently before the glass and coaxed her own locks into just such fashion as had framed the older face. It was done, and Lucy Ann looked at herself with a smile all suffused by love and longing. She was not herself any more; she had gone back a generation, and chosen a warmer niche. She could have kissed her face in the glass, it was so like that other dearer one. She did finger the little curls, with a reminiscent passion, not daring to think of the darkness where the others had been shut; and at that instant she felt very rich. The change suggested a more faithful portraiture, and she went up into the spare room and looked through the closet where her mother's clothes had been hanging so long, untouched. She selected a purple thibet, with a little white sprig, and, slipping off her own dress, stepped into it. She crossed a muslin kerchief on her breast, and pinned it with the cameo her mother had been used to wear. She did not like to look at herself in the doing, but when the deed was over, she went again to the glass and stood there, held by a wonder beyond her will. She had resurrected the creature she loved; this was an enduring portrait, perpetuating, in her own life, another life as well.

"I'll pack away my own clo'es to-morrow," said Lucy Ann to herself. "Them are the ones to be put aside."

She went down stairs, hushed and tremulous, and seated herself again, her thin hands crossed upon her lap; and there she stayed, in a pleasant dream, not of the future, and not even of the past, but face to face with a recognition of wonderful possibilities. She had dreaded her loneliness with the ache that is despair; but she was not lonely any more. She had been allowed to set up a little model of the tabernacle where she had worshiped; and, having that, she ceased to be afraid. To sit there, clothed in such sweet familiarity of line and likeness, had tightened her grasp upon the things that are. She did not seem to herself altogether alive, nor was her mother dead. They had been

fused, by some wonderful alchemy; and instead of being worlds apart, they were at one. So, John Cummings, her brother, stepping briskly in, after tying his horse at the gate, came upon her unawares, and started, with a hoarse, thick cry. It was in the dusk of evening; and, seeing her outline against the window, he stepped back against the wall and leaned there a moment, grasping at the casing with one hand. "Good God!" he breathed, at last, "I thought 'twas mother!"

Lucy Ann rose, and went forward to meet him.

"Then it's true," said she. "I'm so pleased. Seems as if I could git along, if I could look a little mite like her."

John stood staring at her, frowning in his bewilderment.

"What have you done to yourself?" he asked. "Put on her clo'es?"

"Yes," said Lucy Ann, "but that ain't all. I guess I do resemble mother, though we ain't any of us had much time to think about it. Well, I *am* pleased. I took out that daguerreotype she had, down Saltash way, though it don't favor her as she was at the end. But if I can take a glimpse of myself in the glass, now and then, maybe I can git along."

They sat down together in the dark, and mused over old memories. John had always understood Lucy Ann better than the rest. When she gave up Simeon Bascom to stay at home with her mother, he never pitied her much; he knew she had chosen the path she loved. The other day, even, some one had wondered that she could have heard the funeral service so unmoved; but he, seeing how her face had seemed to fade and wither at every word, guessed what pain was at her heart. So, though his wife had sent him over to see how Lucy Ann was getting on, he really found out very little, and felt how painfully dumb he must be when he got home. Lucy Ann was pretty well, he thought he might say. She'd got to looking a good deal like mother.

They took their "blindman's holiday," Lucy Ann once in a while putting a stick on the leaping blaze, and, when John questioned her, giving a low-toned reply. Even her voice had changed. It might have come from that bedroom, in one of the pauses between hours of pain, and neither would have been surprised.

"What makes you burn beech?" asked

John, when a shower of sparks came crackling at them.

"I don't know," she answered. "Seems kind o' nat'ral. Some of it got into the last cord we bought, an' one night it snapped out, an' most burnt up mother's nightgown an' cap while I was warmin' 'em. We had a real time of it. She scolded me, an' then she laughed, an' I laughed—an' so, when I see a stick or two o' beech to-day, I kind o' picked it out a-purpose."

John's horse stamped impatiently from the gate, and John, too, knew it was time to go. His errand was not done, and he balked at it.

"Lucy Ann," said he, with the bluntness of resolve, "what you goin' to do?"

Lucy Ann looked sweetly at him through the dark. She had expected that. She smoothed her mother's dress with one hand, and it gave her courage.

"Do?" said she; "why, I ain't goin' to do nothin'. I've got enough to pull through on."

"Yes, but where you goin' to live?"

"Here."

"Alone?"

"I don't feel so very much alone," said she, smiling to herself. At that moment she did not. All sorts of sweet possibilities had made themselves real. They comforted her like the presence of love.

John was a messenger. He was speaking for others that with which his soul did not accord.

"The fact is," said he, "they're all terrible set against it. They say you're gittin' along in years. So you be. So are we all. But they will have it, it ain't right for you to live on here alone. Mary says she should be scairt to death. She wants you should come an' make it your home with us."

"Yes, I dunno but Mary would be scared," said Lucy Ann, placidly. "But I ain't. She's real good to ask me; but I can't do it, no more'n she could leave you an' the children an' come over here to stay with me. Why, John, this is my home!"

Her voice sank upon a note of passion. It trembled with memories of dewy mornings and golden eves. She had not grown here, through all her youth and middle life, like the moss upon a rock, without fitting into the hollows and softening the angles of her poor habitation. She had drunk the sunlight and the rains of one small spot, and she knew how both would fall. The place, its

sky and clouds and breezes, belonged to her, but she belonged to it as well.

John stood between two wills, his own and that of those who had sent him. Left to himself, he would not have harassed her. To him also, wedded to a hearth where he found warmth and peace, it would have been sweet and comfortable to live there always, though alone, and die by the light of its dying fire. But Mary thought otherwise, and in matters of worldly judgment he could only yield.

"I don't want you should make a mistake," said he. "Maybe you an' I don't look for'ard enough. They say you'll repent it if you stay, an' there'll be a hurrah-boys all round. What say to makin' us a visit? That'll kind o' stave it off, an' then we can see what's best to be done."

Lucy Ann put her hands to her delicate throat, where her mother's gold beads lay lightly, with a significant touch. She, like John, had an innate gentleness of disposition. She trusted her own power to judge.

"Maybe I might," said she, faintly. "Oh, John, do you think I've got to?"

"It needn't be for long," answered John, briefly, though he felt his eyes moist with pity of her. "Maybe you could stay a month?"

"Oh, I couldn't do that!" cried Lucy Ann, in wild denial. "I never could in the world. If you'll make it a fortnight, an' harness up yourself, an' bring me home, maybe I might."

John gave his word, but when he took his leave of her she leaned forward into the dark, where the impatient horse was fretting, and made her last condition.

"You'll let me turn the key on things here jest as they be? You won't ask me to break up nuthin'?"

"Break up!" repeated John, with the intensity of an oath. "I guess you needn't. If anybody puts that on you, you send 'em to me."

So Lucy Ann packed her mother's dresses into a little hair trunk that had stood in the attic unused for many years, and went away to make her visit. When she drove up to the house, sitting erect and slender in her mother's cashmere shawl and black bonnet, Mary, watching from the window, gave a little cry, as at the risen dead. John had told her about Lucy Ann's transformation, but she put it all aside as a crazy notion, not likely to last; now it seemed less a pathetic

masquerade than a strange by-path taken by nature itself.

The children regarded it with awe, and half the time called Lucy Ann "Grandma." That delighted her. Whenever they did it, she looked up to say, with her happiest smile,

"There! that's complete. You'll remember Grandma, won't you? We mustn't ever forget her."

Here, in this warm-hearted household, anxious to do her service in a way that was not her own, she had some happiness, of a tremulous kind; but it was all built up of her trust in a speedy escape. She knit mittens, and sewed long seams; and every day her desire to fill the time was irradiated by the certainty that twelve hours more were gone. A few more patient intervals, and she should be at home. Sometimes, as the end of her visit drew nearer, she woke early in the morning with a sensation of irresponsible joy, and wondered, for an instant, what had happened to her. Then it always came back, with an inward flooding that she had scarcely felt even in her placid youth. At home there would be so many things to do, and, above all, such munificent leisure! For there she would feel no need of feverish action to pass the time. The hours would take care of themselves, and fleet by, while she sat, her hands folded, communing with old memories.

The day came, and the end of her probation. She trembled a good deal, packing her trunk in secret, to escape Mary's remonstrances; but John stood by her, and she was allowed to go.

"You'll get sick of it," called Mary after them. "I guess you'll be glad enough to see the children again, an' they will you. Mind, you've got to come back an' spend the winter."

Lucy Ann nodded happily. She could agree to anything sufficiently remote; and the winter was not yet here.

The first day in the old house seemed to her like new birth in Paradise. She wandered about, touching chairs and tables and curtains, the manifest symbols of an undying past. There were loving duties to be done, but she could not do them yet. She had to look her pleasure in the face, and learn its lineaments.

Next morning came Brother Ezra, and Lucy Ann hurried to meet him with an exaggerated welcome. Life was never very friendly to Ezra, and those who belonged to

him had to be doubly kind. They could not change his luck, but they might sweeten it. They said the world had not gone well with him; though sometimes it was hinted that Ezra, being out of gear, could not go with the world. All the rivers ran away from him, and went to turn some other mill. He was ungrudging of John's prosperity, but still he looked at it in some disparagement, and shook his head. His cheeks were channeled long before youth was over; his feet were weary with honest serving, and his hands grown hard with toil. Yet he had not arrived, and John was at the goal before him.

"We heard you'd been stayin' with John's folks," said he to Lucy Ann. "Leastways, Abby did, an' she thinks mebbe you've got a little time for us now, though we ain't nothin' to offer compared to what you're used to over there."

"I'll come," said Lucy Ann, promptly. "Yes, I'll come, an' be glad to."

It was a part of her allegiance to the one who had gone.

"Ezra needs bracin'," she heard her mother say, in many a sick-room gossip. "He's got to be flattered up, an' have some grit put into him."

It was many weeks before Lucy Ann came home again. Cousin Rebecca, in Saltash, sent her a cordial letter of invitation for just as long as she felt like staying; and the moneyed cousin at the Ridge wrote in like manner, following her note by a telegram, intimating that she would not take no for an answer. Lucy Ann frowned in alarm when the first letter came, and studied it by daylight and in her musings at night, as if some comfort might lurk between the lines. She was tempted to throw it in the fire, not answered at all. Still, there was a reason for going. This cousin had a broken hip; she needed company, and the flavor of old times. The other had married a "drinkin' man," and might feel hurt at being refused. So, fortifying herself with some inner resolution she never confessed, Lucy Ann set her teeth and started out on a visiting campaign. John was amazed. He drove over to see her while she was spending a few days with an aunt in Sudleigh.

"When you been home last, Lucy Ann?" asked he.

A little flush came into her face, and she winked bravely.

"I ain't been home at all," said she, in a low tone. "Not sence August."

John groped vainly in mental depths for other experiences likely to illuminate this. He concluded that he had not quite understood Lucy Ann and her feeling about home; but that was neither here nor there.

"Well," he remarked, rising to go, "you're gettin' to be quite a visitor."

"I'm tryin' to learn how," said Lucy Ann, almost gayly. "I've been a-cousinin' so long, I sha'n't know how to do anything else."

But now the middle of November had come, and she was again in her own house. Cousin Titcomb had brought her there and driven away, concerned that he must leave her in a cold kitchen, and only deterred by a looming horse-trade from staying to build a fire. Lucy Ann bade him good-by, with a gratitude which was not for her visit, but all for getting home; and when he uttered that terrifying valedictory known as "coming again," she could meet it cheerfully. She even stood in the door, watching him away; and not until the rattle of his wheels had ceased on the frozen road did she return to her kitchen and stretch her shawled arms pathetically upward.

"I thank my heavenly Father!" said Lucy Ann, with the fervency of a great experience.

She built her fire, and then unpacked her little trunk, and hung up the things in the bedroom where her mother's presence seemed still to cling.

"I'll sleep here now," she said to herself. "I won't go out of this no more."

Then all the little homely duties of the hour cried out upon her, like children long neglected; and, with the luxurious leisure of those who may prolong a pleasant task, she set her house in order. She laid out a programme to occupy her days. The attic should be cleaned to-morrow. In one day? Nay, why not three, to hold Time still, and make him wait her pleasure? Then there were the chambers, and the living-rooms below. She felt all the excited joy of youth; she was tasting anticipation at its best.

"It'll take me a week," said she. "That will be grand." She could hardly wait even for the morrow's sun; and that night she slept like those of whom much is to be required, and who must wake in season. Morning came, and mid-forenoon, and while she stepped about under the roof where dust had gathered and bitter herbs told tales of summers past, John drove into the yard. Lucy Ann threw up the attic window and leaned out.

"You put your horse up, an' I'll be through here in a second," she called. "The barn's open."

John was in a hurry.

"I've got to go over to Sudleigh, to meet the twelve o'clock," said he. "Harold's comin'. I only wanted to say I'll be over after you the night before Thanksgivin'. Mary wants you should be sure to be there to breakfast. You all right? Cephas said you seemed to have a proper good time over there."

John turned skillfully on the little green and drove away. Lucy Ann stayed at the window watching him, the breeze lifting her gray curls, and the sun smiling at her. She withdrew slowly into the attic, and sank down upon the floor close by the window. She sat there and thought, and the wind still struck upon her unheeded. Was she always to be subject to the tyranny of those who had set up their hearthstones in a more enduring form? Was her home not a home merely because there were no men and children in it? She drew her breath sharply, and confronted certain problems of the greater world, not knowing what they were. To Lucy Ann they did not seem problems at all. They were simply touches on the individual nerve, and she felt the pain. Her own inner self throbbed in revolt, but she never guessed that any other part of nature was throbbing with it. Then she went about her work, with the patience of habit. It was well that the attic should be cleaned, though the savor of the task was gone.

Next day she walked to Sudleigh, with a basket on her arm. Often she sent her little errands by the neighbors; but to-day she was uneasy, and it seemed as if the walk might do her good. She wanted some soda and some needles and thread. She tried to think they were very important, though some sense of humor told her grimly that household goods are of slight use to one who goes a-cousining. Her day at John's would be prolonged to seven; nay, why not a month, when the winter itself was not too great a tax for them to lay upon her? In her deserted house soda would lose its strength, and even cloves decay. Lucy Ann felt her will growing very weak within her; indeed, at that time she was hardly conscious of having any will at all.

It was Saturday, and John and Ezra were almost sure to be in town. She thought of that, and how pleasant it would be to hear

from the folks ; so much pleasanter than to be always facing them on their own ground, and never on hers. At the grocery she came upon Ezra, mounted on a wagon-load of meal-bags, and just gathering up the reins.

"Hullo !" he called. "You didn't walk?"

"Oh, I jest clipped it over," returned Lucy Ann, carelessly. "I'm goin' to get a ride home. I see Marden's wagon when I come by the post-office."

"Well, I hadn't any expectation o' your being here," said Ezra. "I meant to ride round to-morrow. We want you to spend Thanksgivin' Day with us. I'll come over arter you."

"Oh, Ezra," said Lucy Ann, quite sincerely, with her concession to his lower fortunes, "why didn't you say so ! John's asked me."

"The dogs !" said Ezra. It was his deepest oath. Then he drew a sigh. "Well," he concluded, "that's our luck. We al'ays come out the leetle end o' the horn. Abby'll be real put out. She 'lotted on it. Well, John's inside there. He's buyin' up 'bout everything there is. You'll git more'n you would with us."

He drove gloomily away, and Lucy Ann stepped into the store, musing. She was rather sorry it was not to be Ezra's, if he cared. It almost seemed as if she might ask John to let her take the plainer way. John would understand. She saw him at once where he stood, prosperous and hale, in his great-coat, reading items from a long memorandum, while Jonathan Stevens weighed and measured. The store smelled of spice, and the clerk that minute spilled some cinnamon. Its fragrance struck upon Lucy Ann like a call from some far-off garden, to be entered if she willed. She laid a hand on her brother's arm, and her lips opened to words she had not chosen :

"John, you shouldn't ha' drove away so quick, 'tother day. You jest flung out your invitation an' run. You never give me no time to answer. Ezra's asked me to go there."

"Well, if that ain't smart !" said John. "Put in ahead, did he ? Well, I guess it's the fust time he ever got round. I'm terrible sorry, Lucy. The children won't think it's any kind of a Thanksgivin' without you. Somehow they've got it into their heads it's Grandma comin'. They can't seem to understand the difference."

"Well, you tell 'em I guess Grandma's kind o' pleased for me to plan it as I have," said

Lucy Ann, almost gayly. Her face wore a strange, excited look. She breathed a little faster. She saw a pleasant way before her, and her feet seemed to be tending toward it without her own volition. "You give my love to 'em. I guess they'll have a proper nice time."

She lingered about the store until John had gone, and then went forward to the counter. The storekeeper looked at her respectfully. Everybody had a great liking for Lucy Ann. She had been "a faithful daughter, and now that she seemed, in so mysterious a way, to be growing like her mother, even men of her own age regarded her with an added deference.

"Mr. Stevens," said she, "I didn't bring so much money with me as I might if I'd had my wits about me. Should you jest as soon trust me for some Thanksgivin' things?"

"Certain," replied Jonathan. "Clean out the store, if you want. Your credit's good." He, too, felt the beguilement of the time.

"I want some things," repeated Lucy Ann, with determination. "Some cinnamon an' some mace—there ! I'll tell you, while you weigh."

It seemed to her that she was buying the spice islands of the world ; and though the money lay at home in her drawer, honestly ready to pay, the recklessness of credit gave her an added joy. The store had its market, also, at Thanksgiving time, and she bargained for a turkey. It could be sent her, the day before, by some of the neighbors. When she left the counter, her arms and her little basket were filled with bundles. Joshua Marden was glad to take them.

"No, I won't ride," said Lucy Ann. "Much obliged to *you*. Jest leave the things inside the fence. I'd ruther walk. I don't git out any too often."

She took her way home along the brown road, stepping lightly and swiftly, and full of busy thoughts. Flocks of birds went whirling by over the yellowed fields. Lucy Ann could have called out to them, in joyous understanding, they looked so free. She, too, seemed to be flying on the wings of a fortunate wind.

All that week she scrubbed and regulated, and took a thousand capable steps as briskly as those who work for the home-coming of those they love. The neighbors dropped in, one after another, to ask where she was going to spend Thanksgiving. Some of them said, "Won't you pass the day with us?" but Lucy Ann replied, blithely :

"Oh, John's invited me there."

All that week, too, she answered letters, in her cramped and careful hand; for the cousins had bidden her to the feast. Over the letters she had many a troubled pause, for one cousin lived near Ezra, and had to be told that John had invited her; and to three others, dangerously within hail of each, she made her excuse a turncoat, to fit the time. Duplicity in black and white did hurt her a good deal, and she sometimes stopped in the midst of her slow transcription to look up piteously and say aloud:

"I hope I shall be forgiven!" But by the time the stamp was on, and the pencil ruling erased, her heart was light again. If she had sinned, she was finding the path intoxicatingly pleasant.

Through all the days before the festival no house exhaled a sweeter savor than this little house on the green. Lucy Ann did her miniature cooking with great seriousness and care. She seemed to be living in a sacred isolation, yet not altogether alone, but with her mother and all their bygone years. Standing at her table, mixing and tasting, she recalled stories her mother had told her, until, at moments, it seemed as if she had not only lived her own life, but some previous one, through that being whose blood ran with hers. She was realizing that ineffable sense of possession which comes when we find that the enduring part of a personality is ours forever, and that love is an unquenched fire, fed by memory as well as hope.

On Thanksgiving morning Lucy Ann lay in bed a little later, because that had been the family custom. Then she rose to her exquisite house, and got breakfast ready, according to the unswerving programme of the day. Fried chicken and mince pie: she had had them as a child, and now they were scrupulously prepared. After breakfast she sat down in the sunshine, and watched the people go by to service in Tiverton Church. Lucy Ann would have liked going, too; but there would be inconvenient questioning, as there always must be when we meet our kind. She would stay undisturbed in her seclusion, keeping her festival alone. The morning was still young when she put her turkey in the oven and made the vegetables ready. Lucy Ann was not very fond of vegetables, but there had to be just so many—onions, turnips, and squash baked with molasses—for her mother was a Cape woman, preserv-

ing the traditions of dear Cape dishes. All that forenoon the little house throbbed with a curious sense of expectancy. Lucy Ann was preparing so many things that it seemed as if somebody must surely come; but when dinner-time struck, and she was still alone, there came no lull in her anticipation. Peace abode with her, and wrought its own fair work. She ate her dinner slowly, with meditation and a thankful heart. She did not need to hear the minister's careful catalogue of mercies received. She was at home; that was enough.

After dinner, when she had done up the work, and left the kitchen without spot or stain, she went upstairs, and took out her mother's beautiful silk poplin, the one saved for great occasions, and only left behind because she had chosen to be buried in her wedding gown. Lucy Ann put it on with careful hands, and then laid about her neck the wrought collar she had selected the day before. She looked at herself in the glass, and arranged a gray curl with anxious scrutiny. No girl adorning for her bridal could have examined every fold and line with a more tender care. She stood there a long, long moment, and approved herself.

"It's a wonder," she said, reverently. "It's the greatest mercy anybody ever had."

The afternoon waned, though not swiftly; for Time does not always gallop when happiness pursues. Lucy Ann could almost hear the gliding of his rhythmic feet. She did the things set aside for festivals, or the days when we have company. She looked over the photograph album, and turned the pages of the Ladies' Wreath. When she opened the case containing that old daguerreotype, she scanned it with a little distasteful smile, and then glanced up at her own image in the glass, nodding her head in thankful peace. She was the enduring portrait. In herself she might even see her mother grow very old. So the hours slipped on into dusk, and she sat there with her dream, knowing, though it was only a dream, how sane it was, and good. When wheels came rattling into the yard, she awoke with a start, and John's voice, calling to her in an inexplicable alarm, did not disturb her. She had had her day. Not all the family fates could take it from her now. John kept calling, even while his wife and children were climbing down, unaided, from the great carry-all. His voice carried its own story, and Lucy Ann heard it with surprise.

"Lucy! Lucy Ann!" he cried. "You here? You show yourself, if you're all right."

Before they reached the front door Lucy Ann had opened it, and stood there, gently welcoming.

"Yes, here I be," said she. "Come right in, all of ye. Why, if that ain't Ezra, too, an' his folks, turnin' into the lane. When'd you plan it?"

"Plan it! we didn't plan it!" said Mary, testily. She put her hand on Lucy Ann's shoulder, to give her a little shake; but, feeling mother's poplin, she forbore.

Lucy Ann retreated before them into the house, and they all trooped in after her. Ezra's family, too, were crowding in at the doorway; and the brothers, who had paused only to hitch the horses, filled up the way behind. Mary, by a just self-election, was always the one to speak.

"I declare, Lucy!" cried she, "if I ever could be tried with you, I should be now. Here we thought you was at Ezra's, an' Ezra's folks thought you was with us; an' if we hadn't harnessed up, an' drove over there in the afternoon, for a kind of a surprise party, we should ha' gone to bed thinkin' you was somewhere, safe an' sound. An' here you've been, all day long, in this lonesome house!"

"You let me git a light," said Lucy Ann, calmly. "You be takin' off your things, an' se' down." She began lighting the tall astral lamp on the table, and its prisms danced and swung. Lucy Ann's delicate hand did not tremble; and when the flame burned up through the shining chimney, more than one started at seeing how exactly she resembled Grandma in the days when old Mrs. Cummings had ruled her own house. Perhaps it was the royalty of the poplin that enwrapped her, but Lucy Ann looked very capable of holding her own. She was facing them all, one hand resting on the table, and a little smile flickering over her face.

"I s'pose I was a poor miserable creatur' to git out of it that way," said she. "If I'd felt as I do now, I needn't ha' done it. I could ha' spoke up. But then it seemed as if there wa'n't no other way. I jest wanted my Thanksgivin' in my own home, an' so I throwed you off the track the best way I

could. I dunno's I lied. I dunno whether I did or not; but I guess, anyway, I shall be forgiven for it."

Ezra spoke first: "Well, if you didn't want to come—"

"Want to come!" broke in John. "Of course she don't want to come! She wants to stay in her own home, an' call her soul her own—don't you, Lucy?"

Lucy Ann glanced at him with her quick, grateful smile.

"I'm goin' to, now," she said, gently, and they knew she meant it.

But, looking about among them, Lucy Ann was conscious of a little hurt unhealed; she had thrown their kindness back.

"I guess I can't tell exactly how it is," she began, hesitatingly; "but, you see, my home's my own, jest as yours is. You couldn't any of you go round cousinin', wi'out feelin' you was tore up by the roots. You've all been real good to me, wantin' me to come, an' I s'pose I should make an awful towse if I never was asked; but now I've got all my visitin' done up, cousins an' all, an' I'm goin' to be to home a spell. An' I do admire to have company," added Lucy Ann, a bright smile breaking over her face. "Mother did, you know, an' I guess I take arter her. Now you lay off your things, an' I'll put the kettle on. I've got more pies 'n you could shake a stick at, an' there's a whole loaf o' fruit-cake, a year old."

Mary, taking off her shawl, wiped her eyes surreptitiously on a corner of it, and Abby whispered to her husband, "Dear creatur'!" John and Ezra turned, by one consent, to put the horses in the barn; and the children, conscious that some mysterious affair had been settled, threw themselves into the occasion with an irresponsible delight. The room became at once vocal with talk and laughter, and Lucy Ann felt, with a swelling heart, what a happy universe it is where so many bridges lie between this world and that unknown state we call the next. But no moment of that evening was half so sweet to her as the one when little John, the youngest child of all, crept up to her and pulled at her poplin skirt, until she bent down to hear.

"Grandma," said he, "when 'd you get well?"



*And let these altars, wreathed with flowers  
And piled with fruits, awake again  
Thanksgivings for the golden hours,  
The early and the later rain!*

—Whittier, "For an Autumn Festival."



